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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the reading interests of sixth-grade students in a rural Virginia county. Twenty-three children (10 girls and 13 boys) participated. The instrument used was a four-page-long reading interest survey, which contained "yes/no," rating, and open-ended questions. Results of the survey indicated that this group of students had a very broad range of reading interests. No single category, book, or author emerged as an overwhelming favorite. The mystery and humorous categories were slightly more preferred than others. Magazines were found to be immensely popular with the students. Teachers may find the survey instrument useful in assessing their own classes' reading interests. (Numerous unnumbered tables of data are included; the survey instrument is attached.) (Author/RS)

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Sixth Grade Reading Interests: A Survey

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Abstract

This study investigated the reading interests of sixth-grade students in a rural Virginia county. Twenty-three children (ten girls and thirteen boys) participated in the study. The instrument used was a four page long reading interest survey, which contained 'yes/no', rating, and open-ended questions. The results of the survey indicated that this group of students had a very broad range of reading interests. No single category, book or author emerged as an overwhelming favorite. The mystery and humorous categories were slightly more prefered than the others. Magazines were found to be immensely popular with the students. Teachers may find this survey instrument useful in assessing their own classes' reading interests.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Several studies have been done which show that childrens' interest in the materials they are reading is a crucial factor which determines how much they will read. The amount they read, in turn, influences their attitudes toward reading, which can last a lifetime. For example, Intonato (1989) said that "to promote the reading habit and to produce a generation of book lovers, there is no other factor so powerful as interest" (p.4). By supplying adolescents with books that truly interest them, educators can make great strides towards producing this "generation of book lovers". The problem, then, is to discover what types of books will keep adolescents reading.

Most of the studies done on the reading interests of children examine the reading habits of a particular group of students, such as the middle school children in a certain public school district. This kind of a study can be very beneficial to the particular class,

school or district in which it is performed. It will give educators valuable information which they may use in planning their curriculum and choosing reading materials. However, after reading several such studies, it becomes apparent that the results vary widely depending on the population surveyed. For example, Jones (1983) found humor to be the least favorite category in her study, while several other researchers found it to be one of the top choices. Granted, some results are similar for the majority of the studies, such as the preference for mystery and fantasy books. Despite these similarities, however, a teacher could not accurately judge the reading interests of her students based on the results of such a study.

The purpose of this study, then, is twofold. First, I hope to develop a means by which a teacher can simply and accurately find out what the reading interests of her students are. By developing a survey instrument which can be used in any intermediate or middle school classroom, I hope to give teachers a means by which to gain a better understanding of their class' reading habits. Keeping these results in mind

when developing the reading curriculum or choosing books with which to supply a classroom library, will ensure a better chance of the students becoming truly excited about reading. This, in turn, will keep them interested in reading, and will improve their reading skills and attitudes.

Second, I will study the reading interests of a particular group of sixth graders in a rural Virgnina county. The students will benefit from this study because their language arts teacher will be better informed about their reading interest. Furthermore, administering the survey to this group of students will strengthen the reliability and validity of the instrument for future use.

Hypothesis

I expect to find a very broad range of interests within the group of students in Madison County, but I hope to find one or two categories that will stand out as overall favorites. These might be the mystery and fantasy categories, as was found in several other studies. However, the results will most likely show a great variety of preferences. Each individual child

taking the survey will have very different interests. This will show that even a group of children of the same age, in the same community and same school, will not have the same reading interests, and that reading interests vary greatly within one classroom. Such results will demonstrate the need for a survey instrument with which a teacher can discover the reading interests of her own class.

Overview

This research project will entail several steps. First, I will examine previous studies done on the reading interests and habits of children, particularly in the intermediate and middle school grades. I will focus on the differences between boys and girls, and on how students choose which books they wish to read. These studies will be summarized in Chapter 2, the literature review. In Chapter 3 I will describe the sample population in further detail. I will also explain how I developed and administered my survey instrument, which can be found in the Appendix. I will then explain the methods used to analyze the results of the survey. In Chapter 4 I will present the actual

results of the survey, and will compare them with the hypothesis. Finally, in Chapter 5 I will summarize the results of the study, relate them back to the literature review, and make recommendations for teachers.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

During the past decade, several studies have been done measuring the reading interests and preferences of children in the intermediate grades. Many of these studies have compared the reading preferences of boys to those of girls. Others have divided the children by race, community, ability level, and maturation. A few have compared the results of contemporary surveys with those of studies done several years earlier. The following summaries of these studies will concentrate on the reading interests of boys as compared with those of girls, and on the factors which influence children to choose certain books.

Feeley (1979) studied the reading interests of all fourth and fifth grade students in the Hackensack, New Jersey schools. In her study, Feeley compared the reading preferences of black and non-black children, boys and girls, and suburban and urban students. She also compared her findings with those of another study

done eight years earlier. The results of Feeley's study show that among the students she surveyed, the boys preferred to read in the categories of sports, media, historical-adventure, informational, and fun-fantasy. Girls preferred to choose from the media, animals, fun-fantasy, social empathy and sports categories.

Three years after Feeley's study, Hawkins (1983) surveyed the reading interests of gifted students in grades 4, 5 and 6. This study also compared the reading preferences of boys and girls. She found that in grade 6, girls preferred books with mystery, fantasy, and humor, and boys preferred humor. Unfortunately, only a limited number of sixth graders were surveyed (3 boys and 10 girls), so these results 'may only suggest trends' (p. 21). The overall results of this study, combining all three grade levels, show that boys tend to prefer science, science fiction, and "how to" books, and girls prefer biographies, poetry, fairy tales, and animal stories.

Jones (1983) wrote a Master's Thesis titled 'The Reading Attitudes and Interests of Fifth Graders'. She administered an interest inventory to 75 students,

questioning them on their reading preferences. In addition, she surveyed the students on how they were most likely to spend their free time: whether reading or engaging in other activities. Although Jones did not differentiate between the preferences of boys and girls, her findings show that books in the mystery and comic categories were preferred overall, and that, contrary to Feeley's study, humor was the least favorite category.

Wolfson, Manning and Manning (1984) studied the reading preference differences between boys and girls, minority and nonminority children, and children in 1984 to children studied in 1960. In all three areas, they found that the results overlap to varying degrees. The more recent study surveyed 415 fourth grade boys and girls in the Birmingham, Alabama City Schools. The results of this study show that boys were most interested in (in order from most to least favorite) the fantasy, adventure, sports, personal problems, and social studies categories, and girls were most interested in the personal problems, fantasy, fine and applied arts, family life and children, and multi-ethnic categories.

Anderson, Higgins, and Wurster (1985) wrote an article titled "Differences in the free-reading books selected by high, average, and low achievers" which examined the reading choices of fourth and sixth graders. Their study was similar to Hawkins' in that the children were grouped by ability level. The findings show that reading preferences do not vary greatly between ability levels. The results of the sixth grade survey show that the most popular categories were: tall tale/fantasy, adventure/mystery, realistic fiction, and information book. As in Jones' study, the results were not tabulated separately for boys and girls.

Perhaps one of the largest reading interest studies was undertaken by Greenlaw (1988). She questioned 1,240 students in grades 4 - 12 about "what they liked to read and how they chose books" (Todd, 103). The overall preferences for all the children surveyed are as follows: 1) mystery, 2) fantasy, 3) jokes/humor, 4) adventure, and 5) sports. When divided by sex, the results changed significantly, with boys choosing: 1) sports, 2) science fiction, and 3) informational; and girls choosing: 1) poetry, 2)

romance, and 3) mystery. The wide range of childrens' ages must be kept in mind when considering the results of this study. The Greenlaw study also examined the reasons why children choose certain books. The overwhelming majority cited three reasons: likes genre, likes topic, and looks/sounds interesting/good/neat. The least common reasons for choosing certain books included: heard of book or saw movie, cover, and pictures.

Coy-Shaffer and Pettit (1989) completed a study of the independent reading choices of sixth graders in the Orange County, Florida, public schools. Their study focused on the reading which occurred during sustained silent reading periods in school. The study found that the overall favorite categories (in order from most to least favorite) were mysteries, adventure, scary, humor, romance, and sports.

The only sex differentiation in this study was the explanation that the majority of the students who selected romance were girls, and the majority of the students who selected sports were boys. Coy-Shaffer also surveyed the students about their choice of author, and found that Judy Blume, Beverly Cleary, and

Stephen King topped the list. Girls also showed a strong preference for Ann Martin, Francine Pascal, and Carolyn Keene, as well as books in series such as Babysitter's Club, Sweet Valley Twins/Sweet Valley High, and Nancy Drew. Boys selections of authors and titles were more varied, with Superfudge and the Hardy Boys series being most frequently listed. The least popular categories were historical fiction and geography. Furthermore, this study mentioned one factor which influences children to choose certain books: when a book has been made into a movie, children will choose to read that book and others by the same author.

Like Hawkins and Anderson, Intonato (1989) studied the reading interests of above average readers, specifically fourth and sixth graders. Intonato used considerably different categories from those previously mentioned. She included several different categories for magazines and for sections of the newspaper, and did not include mystery, adventure, romance, or humor as distinct categories. Her findings indicate that boys showed the greatest interest in comic books, movie magazines, science fiction, and comic strips, while

girls demonstrated preference for movie magazines and poems. This unique choice of categories, however, makes a comparison between this and other studies rather difficult.

Isaacs (1992) reported on the favorite topics and authors of students in one middle school, The Park School, and on factors that influenced their choice of certain books. Suspense and horror stories emerged as the favorite overall topics. Science fiction and high fantasy were preferred by "a small number of very prolific readers, almost all boys" (p. 132). Stories of family, school and camp life, as well as mysteries, were also favorite categories. Stephen King has tremendous appeal for boys and girls alike. Some authors which Isaacs found to appeal mainly to boys are Piers Anthony, Lloyd Alexander, J.R.R. Tolkien, Robert Cormier, and Agatha Christie. In addition to King, girls also enjoyed Lois Duncan, Paula Danziger, Judy Blume, Betsy Byars, Cynthia Voigt, Carolyn Keene, and Anne Martin. Isaacs (1992) also found that "boys preferred titles starring boys and girls preferred titles starring girls" (p. 137). Isaacs carried her study beyond reporting what students chose; she also

examined how they choose books. The most common factors influencing the students choice of books were: peer recommendation, known authors, books read in other classes at school, adult suggestions, and books previously seen in movies or TV.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF STUDY

Sample

As previously mentioned, this study was administered in a rural Virginia county middle school. The survey was given to a class of 23 sixth-grade students in the local middle school. Most of the students were 11 or 12 years old. 10 girls and 13 boys participated in the study. Approximately eight of the students taking this survey had been formally identified as gifted.

Procedures

The instrument I used to study the reading interests of this group of sixth graders was a survey. In developing this survey, I first examined previously designed reading interest surveys. Kellerman (1991), Coy-Shaffer and Pettit (1989), and Jones (1983) had all created such surveys for their research. I found it helpful to look at what kinds of questions had been used in previous surveys. However, I found that my

research needs would best be met by a survey that was designed specifically for this class. I modeled some of my questions on ones that I had seen in the previously done surveys, and added several questions of my own. The result was a four page, 16 question survey (see the Appendix), which includes both open-ended questions, and questions which ask the students to rank order a list of preferences. I felt that this combination of questions and styles would be best suited to my study. The open-ended questions were necessary because I wanted the students to name particular books, authors, and magazines that they liked, and this could only be accomplished by such questions.

My procedures for administering the survey were simple. I introduced the study to the class by saying "I am doing a research project on the reading interests of sixth graders. The results of this project will help me and other teachers because we can design our Language Arts classes with your reading interests in mind. Therefore, the most important thing for you to do is to be completely honest in filling out these surveys. No one but I will see them, and even I will

not know who you are because your names do not go on them." I also reminded the students that these questions were about books that they read outside of school, **not** ones that they had to read for school. After passing out the surveys, I asked everyone to turn to the last page so I could explain the directions to the last question (number 16), which asked the students to rate several different types of reading materials. I read the directions to number 16 aloud, and explained how they would rank 'sports' depending on how much they liked books about sports. Finally, I told the students to ask me any questions they might have during the survey, and to go ahead and begin.

In analyzing the results of the surveys, I went through each question and tabulated the responses for girls, boys, and both. For the 'yes or no' questions and the rating questions, I simply counted the number of times that each response was chosen, and calculated the percentages for each response. For the open-ended questions, I noted if any answer was listed by more than one student. If it was, I kept a record of how many such answers appeared.

In the next section I will present these results.

The results for each question will be listed separately. When appropriate, the results will be presented in table form. However, some of the open-ended questions require a narrative form of presentation. I will also note any trends that emerged from these surveys, offer some thoughts as to why the results might have appeared as they did, and discuss whether or not the results support my hypothesis. I will conclude by comparing the results of this study to the results of previously done reading interest surveys.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

Results

In this section I will present the results of the survey question by question. For each item I will give the overall results, which indicate the responses of the 23 students who took the survey. I will also give the results for the 10 girls and 13 boys separately. Note: the percentages are rounded up to the nearest whole number.

1. Do you like to read in your free time?

	OVERALL	GIRLS	BOYS
Yes	57%	80%	38%
No	9%	-	15%
Sometimes	35%	20%	46%

2. Name one or two of your favorite books. If you do not have a favorite, name a book that you liked pretty much.

Of the books that were listed by more than one

student, Matilda was mentioned by 13% of the students, all of whom were girls. Chain Letter was also mentioned by 13% of the students (two girls and one boy). Nine percent of the students (two girls) indicated the Nancy Drew series in response to this question.

Books which were mentioned by one girl only include: Scavenger Hunt, Anne of Green Gables, Number the Stars, Charlotte's Web, Anastasia has the Answers, The Kissing Contest, More Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark, Sport, and Almost Like a Sister.

Books which were mentioned by one boy only include: Super Fudge, Hatchet, The Stand, Misery, The Bible, A Wind in the Door, A Swiftly Tilting Planet, A Wrinkle in Time, My Teacher is an Alien, Island of the Blue Dolphins, Star Trek 6, Something Upstairs, The Incredible Journey, Hardy Boys Casefiles, Soccer Halfback, and The Narnia Series.

3. What made you like this book/these books?

"Funny" or "humorous" were the prevalent characteristics listed by the students in response to this question. Twenty-two percent of the class listed

either "funny" or "humorous" (two girls and three boys). Some other common responses were: "excitement" listed by 17% (two girls and two boys); "adventure" listed by 13% (two boys and one girl); "suspense" also listed by 13% (three girls); and "scary" and "mystery" both listed by nine percent (one girl and one boy for each).

4. What are some other books that you really liked? For the ten girls, the titles mentioned, and how many times they were mentioned, are as follows:

TITLE	NUMBER OF TIMES
The Babysitters Club	3
Sweet Valley Twins	2
Sweet Valley High	1
Nancy Drew	1
BFG	1
The Trilogy by Christopher Pike	1
Scavenger Hunt	1

*Note: The titles listed above were all cited more than once in the survey. For example, BFG and books by Christopher Pike were also given by boys in response to

this question. Nancy Drew and Scavenger Hunt appeared in question two of the survey.

For the boys, the following books were each listed once. As with the girls, these books had been cited elsewhere in the surveys at least once.

Star Trek*

Hardy Boys*

BFG

Matilda

books by Christopher Pike

*These books had been listed by one boy each in response to question number two.

5. Do you have a favorite author?

	OVERALL	GIRLS	BOYS
Yes	65%	70%	62%
No	35%	30%	38%

If you do, write his or her name. If you do not remember their name, write the name of a book they wrote.

Five different writers were each mentioned by 9% of the students in response to this question. The

following three authors were all listed by one boy and one girl: Roald Dahl, Madeline L'Engle, and Judy Blume. In addition, Christopher Pike was mentioned by two girls, and Stephen King by two boys.

6. If you really like a book, will you read others by the same author?

	OVERALL	GIRLS	BOYS
Yes	91%	100%	85%
No	4%	-	8%

**Note: One boy picked neither response but wrote in 'maybe'.

7. Have you read any series (more than one book by the same author)?

	OVERALL	GIRLS	BOYS
Yes	87%	100%	77%
No	13%	-	23%

If you have, what is the series (or the names of the books and their author)?

The Hardy Boys series was mentioned by 22% of the students (five boys); Babysitters Club was mentioned by 13% (three girls); Sweet Valley High, Sweet Valley

Twins, and Nancy Drew by nine percent (two girls); and the Wrinkle in Time series by nine percent (one boy and one girl).

8. Have you ever read a book that you thought was really bad?

	OVERALL	GIRLS	BOYS
Yes	35%	30%	38%
No	65%	70%	62%

If you have, what is the name of the book (or books)?

The only book mentioned more than once was Onion John, which was listed by two students, but which is a book that was required reading for their Language Arts class. Wrinkle in Time was mentioned by one girl. Some other responses were Noon Day Friends, Anne of Green Gables, and "my little cousin's ABC book".

9. What made you not like this book?

Seventeen percent of the students responded with "boring", "dull", or "wasn't exciting". One student said "I couldn't understand it and it was too serious". Of the little cousin's ABC book, the student said "it was a little kid's book".

10. Do you like to read any magazines?

	OVERALL	GIRLS	BOYS
Yes	96%	90%	100%
No	4%	10%	-

If you do, which ones do you like to read (name as many as you want)?

Boys Life was the most frequently mentioned magazine, with 39% of the students listing it (two girls and seven boys). Two other magazines were listed by both boys and girls: 3-2-1 Contact and Highlights, both of which were mentioned by nine percent of the students (one boy and one girl each). 30% of the girls listed Teen and World.

The magazines mentioned by boys are as follows:

MAGAZINE	% of BOYS
Sports Illustrated	23%
Popular Science	23%
Guns & Ammo	15%
National Geographic	15%
Progressive Farmer	8%
Off Road	8%

11. Do you ever read the newspaper?

	OVERALL	GIRLS	BOYS
Yes	74%	100%	54%
No	26%	-	46%

If you do, what are your favorite sections?

The following categories were mentioned by the percentage of students indicated:

	OVERALL	GIRLS	BOYS
Comics	65%	90%	46%
Classifieds	17%	20%	15%
Horoscope	13%	20%	8%
Sports	9%	10%	8%
Obituaries	4%	10%	-
Ann Landers	4%	10%	-
"tragedies"	4%	10%	-
"current events"	4%	-	8%
"big news stories"	4%	10%	-
"headlines"	4%	-	8%
"married articles"	4%	10%	-

12. Which of the following things make you want to read a certain book? (check all that apply)

A friend recommends it

OVERALL 78% GIRLS 100% BOYS 62%

I like other books by the same author

OVERALL 87% GIRLS 100% BOYS 77%

My teacher recommends it

OVERALL 35% GIRLS 60% BOYS 15%

The librarian recommends it

OVERALL 43% GIRLS 60% BOYS 31%

My Mom or Dad recommends it

OVERALL 48% GIRLS 60% BOYS 38%

I have seen the movie

OVERALL 61% GIRLS 50% BOYS 69%

It has an interesting cover

OVERALL 65% GIRLS 60% BOYS 69%

It is about a topic that I like

OVERALL 96% GIRLS 100% BOYS 92%

Which ONE of these things MOST makes you want to read a certain book?

The following factors were indicated OVERALL:

It is about a topic that I like	43%
I like other books by the same author	22%
I have seen the movie	13%
A friend recommends it	9%
It has an interesting cover	9%

The GIRLS indicated the following factors:

It is about a topic that I like	40%
I like other books by the same author	30%
A friend recommends it	10%
It has an interesting cover	10%
All*	10%

*Note: "All" was written in by one girl.

The BOYS indicated the following factors:

It is about a topic that I like	46%
I have seen the movie	23%
I like other books by the same author	15%
A friend recommends it	8%
It has an interesting cover	8%

13. Is there anything else that would make you want to read a certain book?

	OVERALL	GIRLS	BOYS
Yes	35%	70%	8%
No	61%	30%	85%

If there is, what is it?

The only response that was listed more than once was "the summary on the back cover", which was mentioned by 30% of the girls. Some other responses from girls were: "If it relates to me like ex. Divorce in the family or a grandparent died", "if I hear lots of people talking about it", and "I was put in suspense when someone read part of it to me". Only one boy answered this question. His reply was "If I can learn something."

14. If you see a movie that is based on a book, are you MORE or LESS likely to read the book?

	OVERALL	GIRLS	BOYS
More likely	48%	50%	46%
Less likely	48%	50%	46%

**Note: One boy chose neither response, but wrote in 'maybe'.

15. Where do you usually get your books from? (mark all that apply)

	OVERALL	GIRLS	BOYS
School Library	70%	80%	62%
Public Library	61%	50%	69%
A friend loans it to me	57%	80%	38%
A teacher loans it to me	30%	50%	15%
Buy from school book fair	61%	60%	62%
Buy from book store	61%	60%	62%
Parents	48%	60%	38%
Other	17%	30%	8%

The explanations given for the "other" response are as follows: "My books, passes down in family" (girl); "relatives" (girl); "gifts" (girl); "my book shelf" (boy).

16. Below is a list of types of books. Next to each one, circle the number that best describes how you feel about this type of book.

1 = I really like this type of book

2 = This type is just so-so

3 = I really don't like this type of book

Note: The results reported below indicate the percentage of students that chose **one (I really like this type of book) for each category.

	OVERALL	GIRLS	BOYS
Sports	22%	20%	23%
Romance	4%	10%	-
Mystery	70%	90%	54%
Humorous	70%	60%	77%
Scary Stories/Ghost Stories	39%	40%	38%
Animal Stories	13%	-	23%
Science Fiction	35%	20%	46%
Biographies/Autobiographies	4%	10%	-
Adventure Stories	57%	50%	62%
Hobbies	22%	10%	31%
Fairy Tales	9%	20%	-
Fantasy Stories	22%	20%	23%
Classics	26%	30%	23%
Science	35%	20%	46%
Nature	26%	10%	38%
Historical Fiction	30%	50%	15%
Poetry	9%	10%	8%
History	17%	10%	23%
Friendships and Families	13%	30%	-

	OVERALL	GIRLS	BOYS
Riddles, Jokes, Puzzles	35%	30%	38%
Geography	22%	10%	31%
People of Other Lands	17%	10%	23%
Fables and Myths	26%	20%	31%
Art and Music	4%	-	8%
Religion	9%	-	15%
Newspapers	9%	10%	8%
Magazines	43%	30%	54%
Comic Books	22%	10%	31%
Motorcycles and Minibikes	17%	10%	23%
"How-to" Books	30%	30%	31%

Analysis

As the responses to question one indicate, this group of students enjoys reading in their free time. Ninety-two percent answered either 'yes' or 'sometimes' to the question 'Do you like to read in your free time?' The two students who replied 'no' were both boys. A much larger percentage of girls (80%) than boys (38%) replied 'yes' to the above question. Most of the boys (46%) replied 'sometimes'. However, this does not necessarily mean that the boys like to read

less than the girls do. For example, in question ten, 100% of the boys indicated that they like to read magazines. Perhaps fewer boys chose 'yes' for question one because they do not consider reading magazines 'real' reading. Or, perhaps it is less socially acceptable for boys than for girls to admit that they enjoy reading.

In examining what these students like to read, I found a great variety of interests. In my hypothesis I stated "One or two categories will stand out as overall favorites. These might be the mystery and fantasy categories..." This statement turned out not to be entirely accurate. For example, in question 3, where the students explained what made them like particular books, the most frequently cited response (given by 22% of the students) was either "funny" or "humorous". "Mystery" was mentioned by only nine percent, and "fantasy" was not mentioned at all.

Furthermore, in question 16, where the students are asked to rate particular types of books, the highest percent of 'one' (I like this type of book) ratings received by any category was 70%. This seems to indicate that no one category is an overwhelming

favorite for most of the students. However, the two that did receive 70% ratings were "mystery" and "humorous". Thus, my hypothesis was not entirely incorrect, in that the mystery category did turn out to be one of the most preferred ones. Only 22% of the students ranked "fantasy" as a 'one', however. The ten top categories, along with the percentage of 'one' ratings received by each, is as follows:

Mystery	70%
Humorous	70%
Adventure Stories	57%
Magazines	43%
Scary Stories/Ghost Stories	39%
Science Fiction	35%
Science	35%
Riddles, Jokes, Puzzles	35%
Historical Fiction	30%
"How-to" Books	30%

Only three categories, mystery, humorous, and adventure stories, received a 'one' rating by more than 50% of the class. Again, this indicates that no one category is an overall favorite.

In my hypothesis I went on to say "...the results will most likely show a great variety of preferences." As shown by the ratings above, this is indeed true. No one category was an absolute favorite among most of the students, yet several categories recieved 'one' ratings by 30% or more. Furthermore, in response to question 2 ('Name one or two of your favorite books'), the greatest number of students to list the same book was three, or 13%. Three students named Matilda and Chain Letter as their favorites, and two named the Nancy Drew series. Twenty-five other titles were given as favorites, each mentioned by only one student. This shows a great diversity of reading preferences among the 23 students in this class.

Also indicative of this diversity is the fact that some books which were listed as favorites by some students were given in response to question six ('Have you ever read a book that you thought was really bad?') by others. For example, Wrinkle in Time and Anne of Green Gables were both mentioned by a student in response to question two ('Name one or two of your favorite books'), yet they were given by other students in response to question six, as books they thought were

"really bad". This clearly shows that the individual students within this sixth-grade class have very unique preferences.

Another trend which became apparent in this study was the impact that knowing an author has on these readers. The majority of the students (65%) indicated in response to question five that they do have a favorite author. As with the books, no one author stood out as an overall favorite. In fact, no author was mentioned by more than nine percent of the students. This, again, points to the variety of preferences within the class.

In response to question six, 91% of the students said that if they really like a book, they will read others by the same author. Series are also popular with these students. In question seven, 87% indicated having read a series. According to the responses to question 12, 'I like books by the same author' is the second most popular factor that makes these students want to read a book. Thirty percent of the girls and 15% of the boys chose this as the most important factor. Overall and for the girls, it was second only to 'It is about a topic that I like'. The boys,

however, also put 'I have seen the movie' before 'I like books by the same author'. Thus, being familiar with and enjoying other works by the same author is a major factor in determining whether or not students will want to read a particular book.

Another such factor is whether or not the student has seen the movie which is based on the book. The responses to question 14 ('If you see a movie that is based on a book, are you MORE or LESS likely to read the book?') were evenly split between 'more likely' and less likely'. However, after examining question 12, it seems that seeing the movie has a much greater impact on boys than on girls. In response to question 12, 23% of the boys chose 'I have seen the movie' as the one factor that would most make them want to read a certain book. No girls chose this as the most important factor. Therefore, although half of both the girls and the boys indicated that they would be more likely to read a book after seeing the movie, seeing the movie has a much greater impact on the boys' desire to read the book.

Although the students in this class have a wide variety of reading interests, there is one thing that

96% of them feel the same way about: they like to read magazines. Only one child out of the 23 said that she did not like to read magazines. Boys Life is the most popular magazine overall for both the boys and the girls. Two other magazines, 3-2-1 Contact and Highlights are read by both boys and girls. Other than these three magazines, the boys and the girls seem to have different tastes. The girls cited magazines such as Teen and World, whereas the boys mentioned Sports Illustrated, Popular Science, Guns & Ammo, and National Geographic.

When examining these results, it is helpful to remember that, because it is a very rural community, many of the children living in this county are experienced hunters. Thus, when Guns and Ammo appears as a favorite magazine choice, it does not necessarily reflect violent tendencies. More likely, it reflects the enthusiasm for hunting which pervades the community.

Although not quite as popular as magazines, newspapers are also widely read by these students. Seventy-four percent answered "Yes" to question eleven, "Do you ever read the newspaper?" A significantly

higher percentage of girls (100%) than of boys (54%) answered "Yes". The comics section was by far the favorite of both the girls and the boys. The classifieds section was the second favorite for both the girls and the boys. In addition to the comics and classifieds, nine other sections of the newspaper were mentioned as favorites by individual students. Again, this shows a variety of preferences within the classroom.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

In surveying this group of sixth-graders, I found that they have a very broad range of reading interests. No one category, or type of book, is an overwhelming favorite in the class. The two types that are the most preferred are mystery and humorous books. Similarly, no single book, or author, is favored by the majority of the students. In fact, when asked to name one or two of their favorite books in question two, the 23 students listed 28 different titles.

The factor that would most make these students want to read a certain book is if it is about a topic that they like. The second most influential factor is if the student has enjoyed reading other books by the same author. Seeing the movie will make half of the students more likely to read the book, and the other half less likely. Magazines are very popular with almost all of the students. However, as with books and authors, they have a variety of preferences as to which

magazines they enjoy reading.

Findings compared to previous literature

Some of the findings from this study were similar to those from previous studies, and some were different. One similarity is that several other studies have also found mystery to be a favorite category (Hawkins 1983; Jones 1983; Anderson, Higgins and Wurster 1985; Greenlaw 1988; Coy-Shaffer and Pettit 1989; and Isaacs 1992). The humorous category was also found to be preferred by the students in studies by Hawkins, and Coy-Shaffer and Pettit. However, several studies (Feeley 1982; Hawkins 1983; Wolfson, Manning and Manning 1984; Anderson, Higgins and Wurster 1985; Greenlaw 1988; Coy-Shaffer and Pettit 1989; and Isaacs 1992) found sports and fantasy books to be popular, whereas this study did not.

The findings of Coy-Shaffer and Pettit (1989) have several similarities to those of this study. They found girls to enjoy series such as the Babysitter's Club, Sweet Valley Twins, Sweet Valley High, and Nancy Drew, and boys to prefer the Hardy Boys. Furthermore, Coy-Shaffer and Pettit (1989) noted that Judy Blume and

Stephen King were among the most preferred authors.

Isaacs (1992) also found these authors to be popular, as did the present study. Isaacs also reported that some of the most common factors influencing whether or not a student was likely to read a book included knowing the author and having seen the story in a movie. These are similar to the findings of this study. However, Isaacs found that peer recommendations were influential, whereas the present study found did not find them to be influential. Like the present study, Greenlaw's (1988) study also found that liking the topic has a great impact on the appeal of a certain book. Unlike the present study, Greenlaw also found that liking the genre has such an impact.

Both similarites and differences arose between previously done reading interests studies and my study. Some of my results supported those of other studies, whereas other results did not. This fact further supports the notion that students have very individual preferences when it comes to reading materials. It is thereby important for each teacher to find what the preferences of his own unique class are.

Recommendations

The purpose of surveying the reading interests of this particular group of sixth-graders was not for teachers to generalize the results of this study to their group of students, but to reinforce the need to survey their individual class concerning their unique interests. As was shown in the analysis, and in the comparison of this study with previous studies, no two classes, or two students, have identical reading interests. Therefore, in order for a teacher to best meet the needs of his classroom, he should administer this survey or a similar survey to his students. After all, the single most popular reason why a student would choose to read a certain book is if it is about a topic that they like. Only by questioning the students on their reading interests can a teacher know what topics they like.

Similarly, enjoying other books by the same author is very influential in whether or not a student will read a particular book. Again, the teacher should find out what authors are popular with his students in order to know which books will entice them.

After surveying his students, the teacher will

know whether or not they enjoy magazines as much as this group does, and if so, which ones. With this information he can stock up on a magazine center where the students can find appealing reading materials.

One other note of recommendation, or caution, is that even though boys and girls seem to have different tastes, one should be careful not to gender stereotype their reading preferences. For example, in this study Judy Blume was listed as a favorite author by both a boy and a girl, and Boys Life was a favorite magazine of both boys and girls.

Finally, this survey found that the school library is the most popular place for these students to get books. Therefore, it would be very helpful for the teacher to share the results of his survey with the school librarian. This would give the librarian suggestions on the types of books and magazines that students enjoy reading, and would also help her to assist the students in making reading selections. If the school book fair is found to be popular, as it was in this study, the teacher might suggest certain types of books to make available at the book fair.

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Appendix

STUDENT READING SURVEY

_____Girl _____Boy

Please answer the following questions about books that you read **in your free time**, NOT books that you have to read for school.

1. Do you like to read in your free time?
   _____Yes _____No _____Sometimes

2. Name one or two of your favorite books. If you do not have a favorite, name a book that you liked pretty much.
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. What made you like this book/these books?
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. What are some other books that you really liked?
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

5. Do you have a favorite author?

   _____Yes _____No

   If you do, write his or her name. If you do not remember their name, write the name of a book they wrote.
   _____
   _____

6. If you really like a book, will you read others by the same author? _____Yes _____No

7. Have you read any series (more than one book by the same author)? _____Yes _____No

If you have, what is the series (or the names of the books and their author)?_____

8. Have you ever read a book that you thought was really bad? _____Yes _____No

If you have, what is the name of the book (or books)?

9. What made you not like this book?

10. Do you like to read any magazines? _____Yes _____No

If you do, which ones do you like to read (name as many as you want)? _____

11. Do you ever read the newspaper? _____Yes _____No

If you do, what are your favorite sections? _____

12. Which of the following things make you want to read a certain book? (check all that apply)

_____A friend recommends it
_____I like other books by the same author
_____My teacher recommends it
_____The librarian recommends it
_____My Mom or Dad recommends it
_____I have seen the movie
_____It has an interesting cover
_____It is about a topic that I like

Which ONE of these things MOST makes you want to read a certain book? _____
_____

13. Is there anything else that would make you want to read a certain book? _____Yes _____No

If there is, what is it? _____
_____
_____
_____

14. If you see a movie that is based on a book, are you MORE or LESS likely to read the book?

_____More likely _____Less likely

15. Where do you usually get your books from? (mark all that apply)

_____School Library
_____Public Library
_____A friend loans it to me
_____A teacher loans it to me
_____Buy from school book fair
_____Buy from book store
_____Parents
_____other (please explain) _____
_____
_____

16. Below is a list of types of books. Next to each one, circle the number that best describes how you feel about this type of book.

1 = I really like this type of book
2 = This type is just so-so
3 = I really don't like this type of book

1	2	3	Sports
1	2	3	Romance
1	2	3	Mystery
1	2	3	Humorous
1	2	3	Scary Stories/Ghost Stories
1	2	3	Animal Stories
1	2	3	Science Fiction
1	2	3	Biographies/Autobiographies
1	2	3	Adventure Stories
1	2	3	Hobbies
1	2	3	Fairy Tales
1	2	3	Fantasy Stories
1	2	3	Classics
1	2	3	Science
1	2	3	Nature
1	2	3	Historical Fiction
1	2	3	Poetry
1	2	3	History
1	2	3	Friendships and Families
1	2	3	Riddles, Jokes, Puzzles
1	2	3	Geography
1	2	3	People of Other Lands
1	2	3	Fables and Myths
1	2	3	Art and Music
1	2	3	Religion
1	2	3	Newspapers
1	2	3	Magazines
1	2	3	Comic Books
1	2	3	Motorcycles and Minibikes
1	2	3	"How-to" Books

Thank You!